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ABSTRACT

This revised version of the 1988 essay "Working with Vietnamese High School Students" includes updated demographics, profiles of the Amerasian newcomers and the children of Vietnamese re-education internees, who have been among the latest arrivals from Southeast Asia, a review of the literature on Vietnamese students, and a discussion of key issues on which to focus when one works with these students. Vietnamese are now the sixth largest Asian American group in the United States. Successive waves of immigration have resulted in the presence in American classrooms of American-born students who are fluent in English, older immigrants who have lingering problems with English, and newly arrived immigrants. Although many early immigrants were characterized by an impressive academic achievement, many later groups came from conditions that broke down traditional expectations and family structures. These students, who include unaccompanied minors, arrive with many educational disadvantages. Teachers must accommodate adjustment problems and learning styles that may be much more passive than those of other students. One table and two maps illustrate the discussion. (Contains 29 references.) (SLD)

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VIETNAMESE STUDENTS: CHANGING PATTERNS, CHANGING NEEDS

BY CHUNG HOANG CHUONG

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Vietnamese Students: Changing Patterns Changing Needs

BY CHUNG HOANG CHUONG

Introduction

Many of the points discussed in my 1988 article, "Working With Vietnamese High School Students," remain applicable today. However, during the last five years, the number of Vietnamese arrivals has increased substantially. The changing demographics warrant a reassessment of the needs and challenges facing this new student population.

This revised essay includes updated demographics, profiles of the Amerasian newcomers and the children of the Vietnamese re-education internees who are among the latest arrivals from Southeast Asia, a review of the literature on Vietnamese students, and the key issues to focus on when educators work with this new diversity.

Demographic Update

The population of Vietnamese in the United States has grown steadily since the influx of immigrants began in 1975. The fastest growing Asian American community during the 1980s was from Southeast Asia. In spring 1991, the number of Southeast Asians in this country passed the one million mark. Vietnamese are now the sixth largest Asian American group in the United States.

Robert W. Gardner, writing in Population Bulletin, estimates that by 2000 the population of Vietnamese Americans will reach 1.2 million, passing the Japanese American and Korean American populations but still ranking third after Chinese Americans and Filipino Americans. This was based on the current rate of migration and the current birthrate, which is quite high. With the change in immigration policies, the number of admissions may decrease and the birthrate is likely to adjust to the pattern observed with many other U.S. immigrant groups.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN MIGRATION

Year	Number	Year	Number
1975	125,000	1984	24,927
1976	3,200	1985	25,209
1977	1,900	1986	22,443
1978	11,100	1987	23,012
1979	44,500	1988	17,654
1980	95,200	1989	31,327
1981	86,100	1990*	40,619
1982	43,656	1991*	44,179
1983	23,459		

*The sudden increase was due to the Amerasian and Humanitarian Operation arrivals under the same ODP umbrella.
Source: Refugee Report, December 1991.

In California, Vietnamese total 280,223 — almost 85 percent of whom chose to resettle in six of California's 58 counties.

Counties	Vietnamese Population	Counties	Vietnamese Population
Orange	71,822	San Diego	21,118
Los Angeles	62,594	Alameda	13,374
Santa Clara	54,212	San Francisco	9,712

According to a California Department of Education report based on a 1992-93 statewide home language census, students from Vietnam comprise the second largest language minority group (19,306) in California schools. (Students from Mexico are first with 204,815.)

HISTORY OF VIETNAMESE IMMIGRATION TO THE U.S.

Vietnamese began migrating to the United States in 1975, after the fall of the Republic of South Vietnam and the neighboring pro-American governments in Laos and Cambodia. In 1973, after more than a decade of military involvement in Southeast Asia, the United States signed the Paris peace agreement, halting all military activities in Vietnam and leaving the governments of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to fight their own war.

Calling this decision the "Vietnamization of the conflict," the United States in reality shifted the burden to its protégés and within two years the Communists took over the entire region. Fear reigned as the first wave of Southeast Asians rushed to friendly embassies to secure safe passage out of their country. The scene on the rooftop of the U.S. Embassy is still vivid in the minds of many Americans and recent documentaries retell that final episode.

The following month, a massive exodus of Southeast Asian refugees caught the world by surprise. In response, a program was set up hurriedly by the United States. Camps in the United States received more than 130,000 Southeast Asians, most of whom were Vietnamese. According to Bruce Grant (1979), the refugee movement, at first thought to be short-term, picked up with the phenomenon of the "boat people" as early as 1976. By 1978, 400,000 refugees had escaped Vietnam.

The tragedy of the "boat people" gained media attention with the visit of U.S. first lady Rosalyn Carter to the refugee camps in Southeast Asia. Her compassion and sensitivity helped raise the quota for admission to the United States to 14,000 refugees per month. In a two-year period, the number of refugees allowed to resettle in the United States jumped from 150,000 to 400,000, including groups from Laos and Cambodia, particularly after the "Killing Fields" years.

Orderly Departure Program

This massive flight lasted until 1982. It slowed with the advent of a new program adopted by Vietnam and the United States. The Orderly Departure Program (ODP) offered the possibility of a legal exit from Vietnam. It allowed families to reunite and decreased the number of Vietnamese attempting the hazardous escape in small, open boats.

Many of these Vietnamese came directly from Vietnam, bypassing the refugee camps altogether. Considered immigrants by the Vietnamese government, they are nevertheless allowed to receive refugee services and access to health and language programs in the United States. The number of ODP arrivals increased in 1982 and has kept a steady pace ever since.

At about this time, procedures governing sponsorship of refugees also changed. From 1975 to 1978, only refugee organizations, voluntary agencies, church groups and humanitarian organizations proving financial capability could sponsor the entrance of refugees in Southeast Asian camps into the United States.

With the number of refugees in the camps increasing drastically and growing pressure from the countries providing temporary asylum, the United States added relatives and friends of refugees to the accepted sponsorship list. Overnight, large metropolitan areas in California — Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, and Sacramento — saw an influx of Southeast Asians, the majority of them Vietnamese.

Amerasian Homecoming Act

In 1987, Congress passed the Amerasian Homecoming Act to allow children fathered by U.S. soldiers to immigrate to the United States. These children were left behind with their Vietnamese mothers in 1975 and it took more than 10 years for the U.S. government to accept any responsibility to them. Only a few Vietnamese mothers had memorabilia of their relationship with U.S. service men that were not destroyed after the fall of the Republic of South Vietnam in 1975.

Under this special legislation, more than 30,000 Amerasians and their close Vietnamese family members who were admitted to the United States as immigrants also qualify for a number of refugee services such as language and job training (Cerquone, 1986). Many of these newcomers arrived in their late teens and have found adjusting to U.S. life extremely painful.

Humanitarian Operation

Along with this 1987 legislation, the United States and Vietnam agreed on another program concerning the resettlement of Vietnamese who were at one time associated with American organizations in Vietnam or who worked for the former South Vietnamese government.

This association brought these people and their families many years of hardship in "re-education" camps. They were finally allowed to immigrate with family members under a program called Humanitarian Operation (HO). This program was still functioning in late 1993.

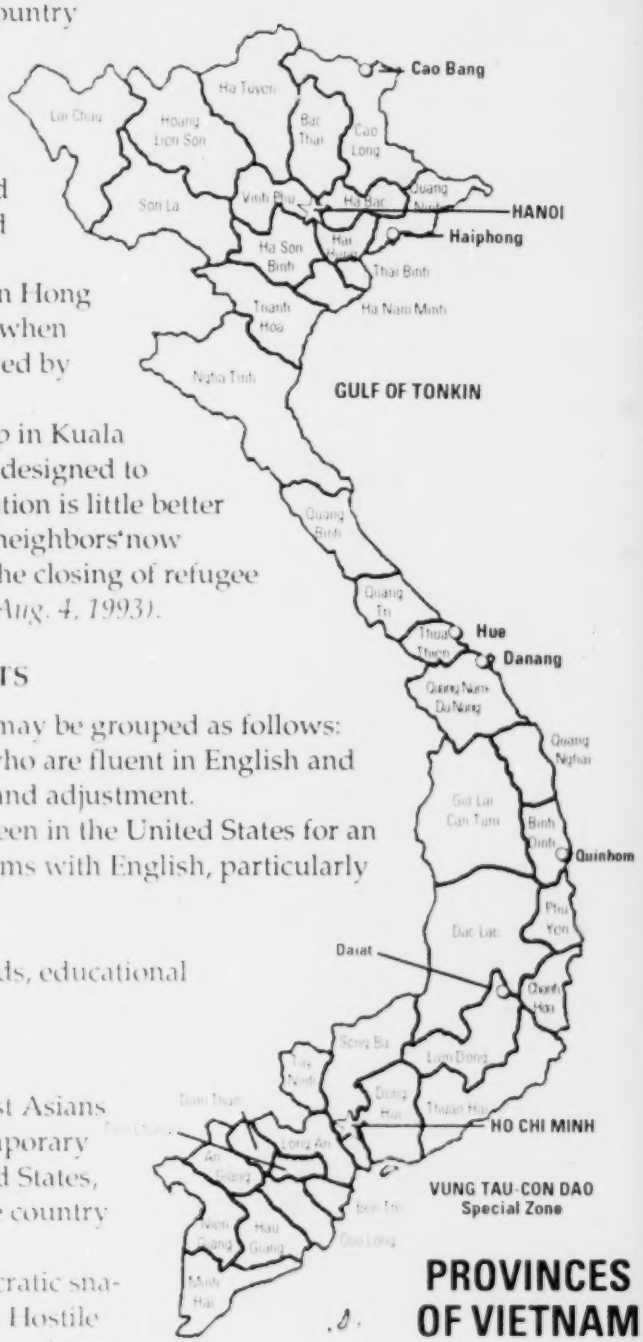
Attempts to slow the flow of refugees

A Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) intended to reduce the number of refugees seeking asylum in 72 participating countries severely limited the number of admissions and increased repatriation of refugees. It also made it very difficult for those leaving their country to qualify for asylum. To be admitted as a refugee, applicants

must prove that they were driven out of their country by a "well-founded fear of persecution." As a result, the number of refugees from Vietnam slowed to a trickle in 1992 when there were more repatriations than exits.

The "Humane Deterrence Policy" applied by several countries starting in 1988 have turned refugee camps into detention centers where refugees are treated as prisoners. The situation in Hong Kong in particular caught the world's attention when several forced repatriation attempts were followed by violence in detention centers.

In Malaysia, the remaining refugee camp in Kuala Lumpur has discarded many camp regulations designed to ensure humane treatment of refugees. The situation is little better in the Philippines and Indonesia, as Vietnam's neighbors now experience "compassion fatigue" and plan for the closing of refugee camps altogether *(Far Eastern Economic Review, Aug. 4, 1993)*.



PROFILES OF VIETNAMESE IMMIGRANTS

Vietnamese students in U.S. classrooms may be grouped as follows:

- American-born Vietnamese students who are fluent in English and experience few problems in terms of language and adjustment.
- Older immigrant students who have been in the United States for an extended period but may have lingering problems with English, particularly in writing.
- Newly arrived immigrant students.

Each group has come with different needs, educational backgrounds and personal histories.

The first wave of Vietnamese

In 1975, when the first group of Southeast Asians left the staging camps in the Pacific and the temporary shelters set up in various locations in the United States, few school districts and communities across the country were prepared to deal with them.

The newcomers were faced with bureaucratic snafus and lack of understanding and compassion. Hostile reactions were reported in some areas where the refugees were viewed as a threat or competition for scarce resources.

Incidents in Seadrift, Texas, illustrate the difficulty of early relationships. Vietnamese fishermen using their traditional fishing techniques came into conflict with the local fishermen using standard American equipment. It took determination and hard work for the first group of refugees to adjust without lasting difficulty.

Their success is due in part to their preparation at work and school in Vietnam. Also, for those first immigrants who left Vietnam in April 1975 and were admitted to school in the United States by the following September, the interruption of their education was much shorter.

These students also had the support of family members, all of whom emigrated together. Many were from middle-class backgrounds with extensive exposure to Western education. Surveys conducted at Camp Pendleton in 1975 and 1976 showed that 48 percent of heads of these households had completed high school, 23 percent had completed college and 4.5 percent had done graduate work. (Liu, 1979)

The majority of refugees in this first movement had lived in large cities in Vietnam. Many had sent their children to private French schools or Vietnamese public schools with a solid reputation. They were from the upper strata of Vietnamese society and were less affected by the lengthy conflict than their rural compatriots.

This is not to say that the children of the first group faced no difficulties in adjusting. Thanh Nguyen, a Vietnamese student in the first wave, described the experience:

"During my first year in high school, it was an entirely different situation. Here the shock of learning a new language and living in a new environment has easened [sic]. In its place was the eagerness to be accepted by my peers.

"Through my experience with discrimination, which came primarily in the form of cruel jokes, I soon discovered that to eliminate these irresponsible acts I must be accepted and respected by my peers. To win their respect, I tried to excel both academically and athletically."

Thanh is currently a design engineer working for a high-tech firm in the Bay Area.

The second wave

The profile of the second movement of refugees from Vietnam was very different. Following hostilities, including a Vietnam-China border clash, the Vietnamese government had become fearful of economic sabotage by ethnic Chinese. So the government began to encourage Chinese Vietnamese to emigrate and began granting them unofficial exit visas.

Life in urban areas under Vietnam's new political system was difficult for many Chinese merchants who had been part of the economic life of both North and South Vietnam for generations. Many families grasped the opportunity to leave. This massive exodus of ethnic Chinese who had been a part of the economic life of both North and

South Vietnam for generations was facilitated by allowing the clandestine departure of small vessels along the coast of Vietnam.

Many of these small boats never made it to neighboring countries. They faced frequent attacks by pirates before finally reaching refugee camps in Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. (Wain, 1981; Amer, 1991.)

Some ethnic Vietnamese chose to identify themselves as Chinese in order to emigrate. The exact number of incoming ethnic Chinese from Vietnam during this second refugee movement was debated. Some said that Chinese Vietnamese comprised the large majority, while others maintained that the largest group was still ethnic Vietnamese. There was no accurate way to determine the exact number of either group.

This second group of Vietnamese refugees ranged from the college-educated to those with little schooling. Their children's characteristics, therefore, also varied. Some performed at grade level, while others who had been constantly displaced by war or kept in refugee camps with little or no academic preparation, were as much as four years behind.

Despite their experience with the first wave, neither refugee workers nor educators were fully prepared to work with this new group. They had few resources or materials available and had to rely on their ingenuity and experience with other minority students to deal with problems as they came.

Uninformed about practices in American schools and worried about their children's education, a number of parents sought to remedy the lack of preparation by falsifying their children's ages. The parents subtracted three to four years from their children's age, hoping that by starting at a lower level the youngsters would be able to perform satisfactorily in school.

Unfortunately, many students have since found that their parents went too far. Finding themselves in a group of students much younger than themselves, many Vietnamese students have encountered social and psychological problems that have affected their schooling. It is difficult for them to function where their classmates may be much younger, but are far more proficient in English than the struggling newcomer.

Reverting to their real age, however, entails grappling with a mountain of paperwork. There is no easy answer to this problem. Resettlement agencies and sponsors are in the best position to inform incoming refugees and immigrants about the issue and to provide alternative strategies and suggestions for parents.

The third wave

By 1982, the number of arrivals decreased substantially due in part to the new ceiling on immigration imposed by the United States and the establishment of the Orderly Departure Program, which admitted Vietnamese as immigrants directly from Vietnam.

During this period, many of the latest group came to the United States by way of the ODP, but many others continued to escape by small boats or by walking across Cambodia to Thailand. From 1982 to 1985, there were 214,263 admissions to the United States from Southeast Asia, of which more than half, 117,251, were from Vietnam. (*Refugee Reports*, 1986)

The children of this third wave presented new challenges to resettlement workers and educators. The change from the children of highly motivated city dwellers to those from families that had spent most of their lives working in rice fields or fishing along the coast was marked by a dramatic decrease in adjustment and coping skills. They were far less prepared than the earlier group who suffered no interruption in schooling.

Furthermore, they went through several major educational changes even before they arrived in the United States. In Vietnam, the new government had switched from a Western (or French) based education system to a socialist curriculum that required involvement and participation in nonacademic activities such as community work, political meetings and other volunteer tasks. Further, these children lost far more time awaiting resettlement in refugee camps than those among the first group. They spent up to three years in crowded camp situations where no formal instruction was available.

Since 1982, the mixture of immigrant and refugee arrivals has made resettlement more complex. Refugee workers have to sort out who is qualified for which programs. This situation affects the family as a whole and, consequently, some children suffered because their parents no longer qualified for certain services. Education is not a choice when a family's economic situation becomes the overriding concern.

These changing demographics are reflected in current profiles of Vietnamese students. They are from a far more heterogeneous group than the first immigrants, representing a wide range of social and ethnic backgrounds: Chinese Vietnamese and Amerasian newcomers, re-education detainees and families, immigrants from both North Vietnam and South Vietnam. It is important to look closely at the current situation to have a better idea of the changing characteristics of Vietnamese students in American classrooms.

CURRENT STATUS OF THE VIETNAMESE STUDENTS

The achievements of Vietnamese students have made headlines in local newspapers and national magazines. They have been the envy of other immigrants as well as the pride of their own community.

The praise was not without substance. Research into the achievement of the children of boat people was published in prestigious magazines such as Scientific American and in publications from university presses. These reports documented the remarkable educational success of Indochinese immigrant children. Despite immeasurable adjustment hurdles, these students excelled in U.S. schools. (Caplan, Choy and Whitmore 1991)

While this is still true in many schools with a high concentration of Vietnamese, the current situation is bleaker than one would expect given the earlier pattern of achievement.

For example, Oakland public schools experienced a high dropout rate among Vietnamese. San Jose Unified School District is also having problems with Southeast Asian youth gangs, Orange County, Los Angeles, Houston — all share this changed pattern of achievement and behavior. The problem is growing worse in some cities. What happened to the straight-A Vietnamese student?

In my earlier paper, I predicted that the achievement pattern might change as the stay in the United States lengthened and with the different demographic characteristics of more recent immigrants. New Southeast Asian immigrants such as the Amerasians and those who arrived under the Humanitarian Operation program differ greatly from previous arrivals and need far more assistance to adjust. The challenges of resettlement are made more difficult when funding for such services is reduced each year.

Preparation for American schools offered in the refugee camps is insufficient for students facing tremendous hurdles of language, cultural adaptation and psychological readiness. Without the assistance of bilingual staff persons, who are among the first fired as school budgets are tightened, these new Vietnamese students have limited opportunities to succeed.

A look at the language census by the California Department of Education (March 1992) shows the effect of these events over the last three years:

Vietnamese Students	**1990**	**1991**	**1992**
Limited English	45,155	34,934	40,477
Fluent English	27,681	28,646	28,406

Source: Language Census 1992, California State Department of Education.

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Unaccompanied Minors

After 1978, many Vietnamese families who had already paid enormous amounts of money to fraudulent escape organizers, sometimes on more than one occasion, could no longer afford the cost of leaving the country.

As a last resort, some families pulled together enough money to send one member to America with friends or relatives who could afford to leave. Usually, this was an adolescent male charged with establishing himself and then bringing over other family members.

Once in the United States, the relatives or friends with whom the young man had emigrated were caught in the struggle for survival and could not care for an extra person. Many simply asked the youngster to move or referred him to their county Department of Social Services. Alone and without support or supervision, these unaccompanied minors had a very difficult time adjusting educationally and emotionally.

The problems and struggles these youths encountered were documented by PBS television. *The Story of Vinh* detailed the difficult adjustment process of a Vietnamese Amerasian who came as an unaccompanied minor. The young man had gone bad, engaging in gang activities. After being dropped by various social service agencies, Vinh was arrested several times and was still in jail when the documentary was made.

How many unaccompanied minors are there with stories similar to Vinh's? Approximately 800 unaccompanied minors were admitted between 1975 and 1979 (*Refugee Reports*, Dec. 1979). With the large influx during 1980-82 and the continuous flow from the Southeast Asian camps, this number is estimated now at more than 10,000.

Unaccompanied minors present a peculiar set of problems for refugee workers. Since they are not orphans, they are not placed for adoption but into foster care, as was Vinh, the youth featured in the television documentary. Cultural differences and language difficulties contribute to frequent misunderstandings between foster parents and these minors. The lack of trained bilingual and bicultural social workers exacerbates this. Many of these youths are uncertain of their caretaker's obligations and misunderstand their own rights. (Baker 1981) Unresolved conflicts often cause the youngster to move out or, as one juvenile counselor expressed it, to "simply skip town, to go to large refugee concentrations where they can find friends and ways to survive."

Foster care does not exist in Vietnam. The extended family provided enough choices of shelter and support so that a young adolescent in conflict with his parents could stay with some relative for a few days until things were resolved. He or she would then be counseled and helped to return home. Lacking that kind of safety net in the United States, the unaccompanied minors experience isolation and depression and frequently turn to the streets.

There are few programs designed to assist unaccompanied minors from Southeast Asia. One program based in San Jose and headed by a Vietnamese social

worker struggles with volunteer help to get enough financial support to assist those minors who are still waiting in Southeast Asian camps. However, for the new arrivals in the United States, this type of effort comes only from private individuals.

Amerasians

Unlike the French, who left Vietnam in 1954 giving Eurasians the choice of French citizenship and the right to immigrate, Amerasians were forgotten for many long, hard years.

From 1982 to 1988, only 4,500 Amerasians were resettled in the United States with their family members. After years of lobbying by concerned groups, the U.S. government finally resolved the issue by allowing admissions of up to 30,000 Amerasians and their close relatives making this a fourth major wave of immigration from Vietnam.

For those children of American service men who had waited more than 10 years to emigrate, this came late. Many who now arrive are in their late teens or early 20s, making resettlement very painful.

They have arrived at a difficult economic time and must try to gain an education, train for a job and adapt to a new culture in record time. It is a task that very few can complete during the eight months in which they are eligibile for government programs and services.

Influence of Tradition

In the mass media, much is made of the idea that Confucianism produces a drive to excel academically. This explanation is widely given for the successes of Asian immigrant groups and is generally accepted without question.

Confucianism undoubtedly has been a powerful influence on Vietnamese culture through the centuries (Woodside, 1982). Variously described as a religious philosophy or a code of social behavior (Thuy, 1976), Confucianism stressed personal growth or self-cultivation, while prescribing the maintenance of order in society and family.

The characterization of Confucian values found in a number of teacher guides ranks authority figures this way: the father below the teacher who ranks only below the king.

The inference is often drawn that Vietnamese students are reluctant to question teachers because of the persistence of Confucian values. Similarly, the achievements of Vietnamese students are generally ascribed to the Confucian emphasis on learning. This explanation overlooks many complexities.

Times have changed. The war not only inflicted damage to the traditional family structure, it also radically affected behavior. Many customs and cultural patterns have changed or faded away. Many families have replaced old values with a new philosophy of survival.

The Vietnamese hierarchy was supplanted under French domination by a new class of landowners who carried out colonial policy. During the American period, easy money and luxury goods turned Vietnamese society topsy-turvy. Poverty and hardship during the socialist era replaced some traditional values with schemes for survival and unorthodox ways of getting rich. Thus, such commonly cited "Confucian" traits as respect of authority and humility are difficult to find.

For example, many articles remark that Vietnamese students do not look directly into another person's eyes as an expression of respect. This may also be simply a normal reaction of embarrassment at not understanding or being able to answer in the new language. Similarly, there are East/West philosophical dichotomies concerning views of human nature: Is human nature basically evil but perfectible or is it basically good but corruptible?

Many refugee guides addressing cultural issues are based on outdated literature. For example, Francois Sully's We the Vietnamese is still used, though it was published in 1971 for foreigners planning to visit Vietnam. Another work often cited to describe the Vietnamese cultural profile is Caddell Crawford's Customs and Culture of Viet Nam (1966). These works also describe the American view as future-oriented and the Vietnamese view as past-oriented and contrast the American tendency toward action and the Vietnamese search for harmony.

These are simple observations and should not be the only explanation for differences in behavior. Even when these studies were done, they did not accurately describe a society caught up in armed struggle.

Updated research is badly needed concerning Southeast Asian cultures in general and Vietnamese culture and Vietnamese American culture in particular. Until such studies are available, we need to exercise caution in using the existing literature. Further, any new findings or updated validations need to be combined with the observations of the instructor to provide answers to practical problems.

Educational and Linguistic Characteristics

The majority of Vietnamese students who come to the United States lack English skills when they arrive. Some of the first wave may have been taught English or French as a second language. (Kelly 1978) However, given the war, frequent displacements and the shift of emphasis in foreign language instruction to Russian after 1975, very few received consistent training.

The study of English was reinstituted in Vietnam and became the preferred foreign language after 1986 when the government slowly shifted to a market economy. At that point, Vietnam was reopened to tourists, foreign investment and returning Vietnamese. The people of Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi are now busy learning English.

A small number of students who had previously received language training in Vietnam found that their training was inadequate once they arrived in this country. While there is a long tradition of language instruction in Vietnam beginning with the famous Ecole des Interprètes in Hanoi, the focus tends to be on grammar, translation and reading. As a result, Vietnamese students usually have more knowledge about grammar and spelling than facility in spoken English. Many experience difficulty with English as a Second Language classes which emphasize oral interaction to develop verbal skills before teaching grammar, reading and writing.

Recently, I visited the Foreign Language Institute in Hanoi and spoke with many students. Since the core faculty was invited to the United States for a short training program in language teaching methodologies, the focus is now shifting to communicative competence along with knowledge of English syntax. The equipment of the institute was updated to allow students to get more exposure to oral communication. However, this has come only recently and at only a few language centers.

As far as writing is concerned, Vietnamese students have an initial advantage over Cambodian, Laotian and Chinese students because Vietnamese writing uses the Roman alphabet with the addition of diacritical marks to represent different tonal values. However, teachers should note that in grammar and pronunciation, these students may still experience problems.

Recent research on language teaching methodology suggests that we should focus on understanding meanings more than laboriously working with pronunciations. Vietnamese words are for the most part monosyllabic, pronounced without final sounds or consonant clusters. Vietnamese students, therefore, tend to drop the final sounds in English particularly in forming plurals. Vietnamese is also a tonal language — most words are pronounced with different tones to express different meanings.

It is not uncommon to hear Vietnamese students adding extra tones to English words. Conversely, lacking experience with the polysyllabic words characteristic of

European languages, Vietnamese have difficulty stressing the correct syllable in English. (For a complete discussion of Vietnamese linguistic characteristics, see A *Handbook for Teaching Vietnamese Speaking Students*, California State Department of Education, 1981, and Huynh Dinh Te's *Introduction to Vietnamese Culture*, Multifunctional Resource Center, 1987)

Language teaching methodology has been updated during the last decade. ESL teachers should use these linguistic theories to improve teaching materials and pedagogical techniques. Of course, this should be done with consideration for individual students. As Corder (1978) has pointed out, good language teachers constantly adapt their speech to the capacities of their pupils rather than slavishly following a syllabus.

From the teacher's standpoint, one difficulty in teaching Vietnamese students is their reluctance to participate in classroom discussion. It is estimated that while American students talk 90 percent of the time to the teacher's 10 percent, the ratio is reversed for Vietnamese students. (Nguyen Dinh Khang, 1976) This may have been true in 1976 but now the number of Vietnamese students who have become accustomed to the pedagogical style of American teachers is increasing and many do not hesitate to share ideas and feelings. Teachers need to know their students well in order to assess the problems they might encounter.

Vietnamese who have spent a great deal of time in school in Vietnam believe that classroom instruction is not a dialogue, but the imparting of knowledge by the teacher. The student's job is to internalize what has been taught, regardless of its usefulness. Teachers evaluate student comprehension according to their ability to memorize entire lessons. This process of repetition, recitation and internalization has been practiced by many generations of students.

The tradition of passive learning creates problems for Vietnamese students in the new American setting, not only in classroom participation but in a number of tasks they are regularly expected to perform. Research papers or book reports, for example, require critical thinking skills, writing skills, support materials from the library and a format with which few refugees are familiar. Accustomed to memorization, they face not only new subject matter taught in an unfamiliar language, but also the need to evaluate, analyze and synthesize.

Much written work produced by Vietnamese students is found unsatisfactory for these reasons. However, these skills can be acquired if the instructor finds ways to include or integrate them in daily lessons. The question for teachers to answer is how much influence have traditional approaches had on their Vietnamese students?

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CHARACTERISTICS IN THE CLASSROOM

Since 1975, the Vietnamese American community has grown into a sizable immigrant group with large concentrations in California. School districts have scrambled for bilingual teachers only to find them moving into the business world for better salaries. As a result, Vietnamese students have had to settle for classes taught by regular teachers. In general, teachers found these first immigrants studious and well-behaved.

As the number of Vietnamese students grew during the early '80s, teachers were faced with a diversity of educational backgrounds and language skills. New arrivals no longer showed the characteristics of the initial group and posed a new challenge to teachers.

With this new diversity, it is not uncommon to find the following three types of Vietnamese students:

- American-born Vietnamese students are fully proficient in English. They have no visible problem in their language skills and adjust quite well to the classroom. In fact, they are no different from their American peers and display the same cognitive skills.
- Older immigrant students who have been in the United States for more than five years. They have an advanced level of oral English but still struggle with writing, social studies, history and other subject matter requiring a high level of English competency. These students may still carry with them the learning style of the Vietnamese classroom.
- Newer immigrant students who are very limited in English proficiency and are struggling in all aspects of education. From lack of English skills to adjusting to the new environment, they are facing a myriad of issues that require special attention. Many have had little schooling and lack basic literacy as well as academic knowledge.

These latest immigrants have experienced disruption in schooling due to their families' economic situation. They might have advanced survival skills, but find it very difficult to sit still and concentrate for an entire day.

It is wrong to assume that these students will not fit into the classroom. They need time and a special approach that emphasizes acquisition of classroom skills appropriate to the American educational setting.

Adjustment Issues

A new refugee in an American school is confronted daily with questions: What am I supposed to do? Whom can I talk to about my problems? Where can I go for answers? Why do they laugh at me? And many others. School personnel, therefore, should be aware of the need to orient both students and parents to:

- The organization of the American educational system, from elementary grades through college.
- Expected behavior in and out of the classroom.

- Details of different educational options.
- Duties and responsibilities of school personnel.
- How academic performance is graded.
- Knowledge and information about the surrounding community and services.
- Parent education and involvement expected.
- After school programs available at the school site.

These issues will arise even for students who went to high school in Vietnam. The two educational systems are quite different. The high school curriculum in South Vietnam (before 1975) was modeled after the French and American systems.

After 1975, the curriculum changed with the inclusion of other topics of study. The education provided in refugee camps is not a full program (except for the PASS program in the refugee camps at Phanat Nikhom in Thailand and Bataan in the Philippines).

Furthermore, teaching and learning styles differ widely. Vietnamese teachers maintain a more rigid code of behavior than their American counterparts. To this day in Vietnam, they still rely on the lecture style at the secondary level.

Outside the classroom, Vietnamese students are expected to follow the same code of behavior — that is, to show respect and rational obedience to parents, teachers and elderly persons. (California State Department of Education, 1982.) Again, it should be remembered that this is an ideal that many students do not meet.

A second problem arises from the wide variety of courses that the students can choose in American schools. Vietnamese students are often confused about what courses they can take and about graduation requirements as well as which courses will be accepted by colleges.

Quite a few are confused and hesitate to take ESL or bilingual classes since some school personnel give contradictory information. Students must be provided with specific guidelines as to whom they can consult on these issues as part of an overall description of the duties and responsibilities of school personnel.

As noted earlier, Vietnamese students have been taught to memorize information presented in class. They often experience difficulty when teachers ask them for their own analysis or reaction to the material, to provide an evaluation of the readings or to synthesize arguments discussed in class.

These are skills that they will acquire along with English proficiency. Younger learners tend to be quicker in achieving the skills that allow them to fully participate. Older learners take longer to become accustomed to the American classroom.

Finally, teachers should be aware that in Vietnam parents have little contact with the schools. They depend totally on teachers for the intellectual development of their children. What Americans might think of as indifference is actually an expression of confidence in teachers and administrators.

Some parents have problems that need to be communicated to the school. However, language barriers keep them quiet and they hope that the problems will go away. This happens more and more when parents see a change of behavior in their children and desperately need to meet teachers and administrators for possible solutions.

To get parents involved, one might use the following strategy:

- Make frequent contact with parents and tell them of their children's progress.
- Offer parent services such as citizenship preparation courses, community service orientation and adult ESL programs.
- Invite parents to be part of an advisory committee after carefully talking through the process with a clear explanation of their role and responsibilities. They must feel confident and comfortable before taking on this task.
- Promote home activities between parents and students.
- Bring parents in for cultural activities and other school programs. If possible, involve them in showcasing their respective cultural traditions.

At home, Vietnamese students have to deal with a new set of problems. Many refugee families face a myriad of unfamiliar social service forms and requirements for refugee programs in addition to the problem of adjusting to a new neighborhood. (Van Esterik, 1982; Forbes, 1985)

These demands often require adolescents to help fill out forms, make appointments and contact social service departments. These tasks take the students away from homework and study time.

Depending on the economic situation of the family, some youngsters have to work part-time to supplement family income. On top of this, many find they have to do a balancing act between the pressure to be accepted by peers at school and pressure to revert to traditional behavior at home.

This dual role, combined with academic pressure and the need to perform tasks for the family, has proved a source of tension and stress. Caught between traditional values and the requirements of modern society, many young people cannot cope and run away from home.

Schools can assist Vietnamese students and their families by providing information about available community resources. Newcomer families, beset with initial resettlement problems, need information about English programs for parents and local community services. Many of these new immigrants have gone through some sort of orientation program in the refugee camps. However, resettlement programs vary to such an extent that the general advice given prior to arrival in the United States is of little help.

School administrators, teachers and counselors need to keep in mind areas of possible conflict in school. Classroom activities such as participating in a discussion or cooperative exercise may create difficulties for students who are not culturally prepared

to interact in the expected way. Some of these problems can be eased by allowing students to use their native language in the classroom, particularly in cooperative exercises. This also allows advanced students to explain concepts and ideas to newcomers and can ease the burden of the teacher.

Changes in the Profile

High school teachers once praised the motivated and well-disciplined Vietnamese students. They worked hard and achieved tremendous results. Nowadays, there are complaints of unruly classroom behavior, high drop-out rates and delinquency.

Students who lack self-discipline, language skills and motivation may be heading for more trouble if teachers and parents do not intervene.

Parents play a key role but may need support from the school to intervene if they see their children turning down the wrong path. Without parental expectation and support and without adults who believe they can help in these students' education, many youngsters are headed for truancy and gang activities. Ascher (1984) pointed out several reasons for the discipline problems:

- Frustration due to language problems and misunderstanding.
- Imitation of inappropriate behavior out of a desire to conform.
- Behavior acquired during refugee camp life where survival was paramount and theft, physical violence and abuses were common.
- Historical animosity between various Southeast Asian groups.
- Difficulty adjusting to school rules that are less strict and well defined than those students expect.
- Cultural gaps in the family resulting from different rates of assimilation.

To identify young people who may be drifting out of school, teachers must know their students. An awareness of those with the following characteristics can warn of trouble in time to intervene. A profile of the at-risk students might include those who have been here more than four years and:

- Who can speak far better than they can read and write.
- Who have been truant more than three times and have frequent unexcused absences.
- Who change rapidly to conform to the current "look" or style of behavior.

Once identified, school personnel can assist them through these means:

- Maintain a database of all students, including information about their families, language skills of parents, employment and a daytime telephone number where parents can be reached.
- Know the names of the students in class and let the student know that he or she is missed when not at school. (Just standing at the door and acknowledging the student is often enough to keep an otherwise anonymous boy or girl returning to class.)

• Information about students should be shared by teachers, counselors, security personnel and health and social workers. The isolation and sense of abandonment of many students can be partially overcome by an informed and caring school staff.

• Contact home when a student is absent. If a student misses school three times, arrange a parent meeting with a bilingual aide or community worker if necessary.

• Encourage students to get involved in a school club or other group activity.

• Contact the Vietnamese student organization at a local university or college for volunteers to lead a Vietnamese club or activity group at your school or to counsel troubled students.

Information must be provided for teachers about the culture and language of their students. Schools must add content and/or language arts instruction in primary languages that reflect students' cultural diversity. Students should be encouraged to read books in their primary language

The role of the school counselor is extremely important. Knowledge of the student's culture and history, cross-cultural communication skills and education orientation techniques are very helpful in addressing students' feelings of isolation and frustration.

Ideally, the presence of a well-trained bilingual/bicultural counselor can help diffuse tension between different ethnic groups. Counseling sessions should be conducted parallel to ESL programs and are most effective when done in the primary language with the assistance of refugee organizations or mutual assistance associations. (Nguyen Dang Liem, n.d.)

Classroom participation, social development and adjustment are far from automatic. Vietnamese students have had little time to prepare themselves for the new environment. They suffer from a tendency not to ask questions when they need clarification, to keep academic and social problems to themselves, and to make little effort to cross ethnic lines in order to bridge cultural gaps.

Their strongest asset is that many are very conscientious about school and strive to do well under difficult learning conditions. Quite a few have succeeded at this educational task.

ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY IN INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT

In the early years of Vietnamese immigration, it was not unusual to read about the achievements of Southeast Asian students; they won the spelling bees and they made the honor roll at the local high school.

Now reports of Vietnamese gang activities have replaced the praise. The tragic story of Michael Nguyen, a young Vietnamese boy kidnapped and murdered in Golden Gate Park, allegedly by Vietnamese gang members, Tenderloin gambling, and invasion of a home by masked robbers in San Jose are what make headlines today.

While police departments include Vietnamese youth in the focus of gang task forces, Vietnamese community leaders are still uneasy about admitting problems. Vietnamese language newspapers mention these violent incidents but do not offer comments or editorials suggesting solutions. Only a few concerned educators and social workers discuss possible answers.

Informal talks with a number of youngsters frequently seen in Vietnamese coffee shops along Senter Avenue in San Jose, suggest as the main causes of gang activities:

- Lack of family support or even an acknowledgment that the problems exist. Without a firm grasp of English and therefore unable to successfully participate in American culture, Vietnamese youth remain in their own community and search for a peer group in which to fit.
- The community at large has little interest in understanding the reasons Southeast Asian youngsters join ethnic gangs. Superficial newspaper articles do not explain that many of these young people came after 1982, without their family and at a time when services were inadequate to assist them in making a healthy adjustment. The community reaction is often to either send these youngsters back to their native countries or to suggest swift punishment from law enforcement agencies.
- Generally, schools do not understand the culture and the history of the country from which these youngsters come and rely mostly on a few bilingual staff members to deal with problems.

A study of Vietnamese high school drop-outs by Thy Nguyen and Thach Nguyen at UC Berkeley (Asian American Studies,1990) distinguishes two types of troubled young people:

- Less serious cases involve those who are bored in class and do not believe that education can really help them. Being looked down on by American peers or having no one at home to supervise or support them closely, they hang out in cafes, night clubs, game centers and pool halls, but usually return home.
- The "Bui Doi" (Dust of Life) group are those who engage in gang activities. They have problems with their families and leave home and find comfort with each other. To support themselves, they have to rely on illegal activities. Many have police records and are proud of it.

The Vietnamese community can no longer afford to ignore the problems of these troubled youth. Although the Vietnamese press acknowledges the problems exist (*Thoi Bao*, Sept. 4, 1993), articles dealing with youth focus on the psychological change that takes place and complain that young people are no longer interested in returning to Vietnam to liberate the country from Communist control.

CONCLUSION

There is no prescribed formula for working with these immigrant students, who come from a wide range of backgrounds. Indeed, the diversity of their experiences and backgrounds increases the importance of examining individual histories and characteristics during the placement process. It also points up the need to see how such characteristics fit into the school.

The well-adjusted Vietnamese high school students are those attuned to the social environment of the school as well as the academic. This is an area where administrators, teachers and counselors can help the newcomer by providing the proper services and support.

Many questions about the experience of the Vietnamese student in American schools have yet to be answered. But it is clear that sensitivity, patience and understanding on the part of school personnel are crucial elements contributing to a positive experience for Vietnamese students.

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